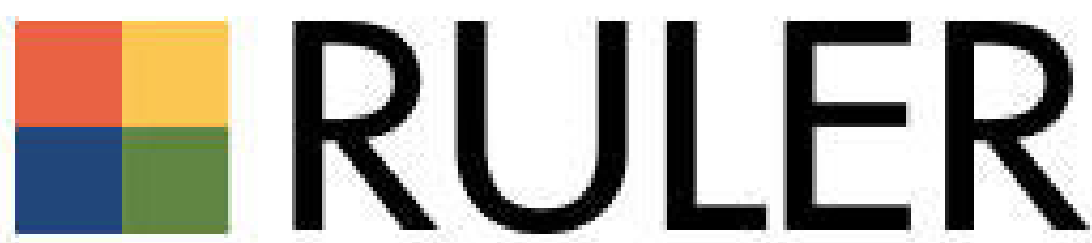


The Impact of a School Wide Social Emotional Learning Program on School Climate: A Mixed Methods Case Study of the RULER Program



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ABSTRACT: To succeed in an ever-changing and challenging society, students need to have strategies to negotiate emotions, relationships, and challenging experiences. Schools throughout the United States have adopted school wide social emotional learning (SEL) programs in order to combat the destructive effects of disruptive behaviors and negative school climates all the while improving student academic and behavioral outcomes. This case study investigates the impact that a school wide SEL program has on school climate at one high-needs, urban pre-K-8 school by measuring changes in student suspensions, student attendance, student academic achievement, and faculty and staff perceptions of school climate.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to determine how a school wide SEL program impacts school climate by measuring changes in suspension data, student attendance data, standardized test scores, and teacher perceptions of school climate at the subject school since implementation of the RULER Program in 2015-16.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS: Central: How does the presence of a school wide SEL program impact school climate?

Quantitative:

1. Has there been a statistically significant change in disruptive student at the subject school since implementation of RULER?
2. Has there been a statistically significant change in student attendance at the subject school since implementation of RULER?
3. Has there been a statistically significant change in academic achievement since implementation of RULER?
4. Do faculty and staff perceive a positive school climate at the subject school?

Qualitative:

1. What are teacher perceptions of school climate?

METHODS: Data from 2014-2015 and 2017-2018 was collected for student suspensions, student chronic absenteeism, and student Smarter Balanced math scores. This data was analyzed using 2 proportion z tests. The “Panorama Staff Survey” was distributed to school faculty and staff to measure the overall social and learning climate of the school. The survey results were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Six classroom observations took place to determine how RULER was being implemented in the classroom at the subject school and to gain a better understanding of the school’s climate. Field notes were later analyzed by coding for themes. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers whose classrooms had been observed. The interviews were analyzed by coding for themes.

CONCLUSIONS: The RULER Program has had a positive impact on both student behavior and student attendance. The impact that the program has had on academic achievement cannot be determined from this study. Faculty and staff perceive implementation of the program and strong school leadership to be two significant factors that have resulted in a positive school climate. The elements of this positive climate are strong and meaningful relationships among staff and students, a shared vision for the school, the belief that faculty and staff have in social emotional education, and the focus on student-centered outcomes. Outcomes of that climate have been improved student behavior, improved student attendance, and positive faculty and staff perceptions of school climate.

RESULTS: There is evidence that suspension rates were higher before the implementation of the program. There is evidence that percentage of chronically absent students was higher before the implementation of the program. The analysis of Smarter Balanced scores provided mixed results: Two of the grade levels tested provided evidence that the percentage of students scoring at Level 1 on the test was higher before implementation of the program; however, two other grade levels tested failed to demonstrate the same. The survey results indicated faculty and staff are consistent in their perceptions of a positive school climate. The interview and observation data analysis resulted in five main analytical themes: Relationships, shared vision, belief in social emotional education, school leadership, and student-centered outcomes.

